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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 004696

SIPDIS

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PACOM FOR FPA (HUSO)

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [TH](#)

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR DISCUSSES THE SOUTH WITH DEPUTY PRIME
MINISTER CHATURON

REF: A. BANGKOK 4596

[1](#)B. BANGKOK 4653

Classified By: Ambassador Ralph L. Boyce. Reason 1.4 (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: On July 15, Ambassador met with Deputy Prime Minister Chaturon Chaisaeng to discuss the situation in southern Thailand. Chaturon spoke frankly, and often critically, of the Thaksin Administration's handling of the situation in the South. Chaturon, a member of the National Reconciliation Commission (NRC), believes the Government's failure to understand the nature of the situation in southern Thailand is perpetuating a cycle of violence and further alienating the local population. Chaturon, while not a Thaksin confidant, is a popular and well regarded U.S. educated politician who has managed to have a very successful political career despite his days as a radical student activist in the 1970s. END SUMMARY

[1](#)2. (C) On July 15, Ambassador met with Deputy Prime Minister Chaturon Chaisaeng. Chaturon has been a key player in recent efforts to deal with the ongoing unrest in southern Thailand. In April 2004, Chaturon submitted a "Seven Point Plan" to the cabinet to resolve the violence. The proposal followed an extended period of consultations with southern community and religious leaders. Among other conciliatory ideas, Chaturon's plan called for a lifting of martial law and limited amnesty for some insurgents. The plan was not received well by the security services and was largely ignored.

IN THE WAKE OF YALA ATTACKS A NEW SECURITY LAW

[1](#)3. (C) Chaturon came to the meeting directly from an emergency cabinet meeting convened by Prime Minister Thaksin to discuss the coordinated attacks in Yala province on July 14 (reftel A). He told the Ambassador that the cabinet had approved an Emergency Decree to replace the selective martial law already in place in parts of the South (reftel B). Chaturon characterized the new law as an attempt to "soften" the image of martial law and claimed that NRC Chairman Anand Panyarachun had been consulted about the new law prior to the cabinet's decision. (NOTE: Publicly, Anand has not been supportive of the new emergency decree. The decree has also been roundly condemned by the media and by NGOs who see the law as an attempt to give authorities more leeway to go after suspected insurgents while limiting press and other civil freedoms in the region. END NOTE)

"THE PEOPLE IN CHARGE JUST DON'T GET IT"

[1](#)4. (C) Chaturon told the Ambassador he wanted to speak frankly and privately about the South. He expressed great frustration that "high level people" (implying PM Thaksin and his senior advisors) still do not understand what is really happening in far southern Thailand. Chaturon complained that Thaksin and other officials are still approaching the unrest with a "policeman's mentality" -- looking at the violence as criminal acts -- rather than understanding the complicated cultural and religious problems in the South. Chaturon said the military high command simply did not understand how to solve a conflict between "citizens and the state." He described the military establishment as falling into two camps -- those who understand the cultural underpinnings of the unrest, and those who want to treat the situation "like a war." Chaturon claimed that the members of the Privy Council also believe that Thaksin does not understand the problem and are very concerned about the government's handling of the crisis.

"TENS OF THOUSANDS" OF POTENTIAL MILITANTS

[1](#)5. (C) Chaturon said he understood the deeply felt feeling of "injustice" in the South and is worried that there are potentially "tens of thousands" of Muslim youth in the region who could turn against the government. Chaturon complained that "the people in charge" are ignoring how widespread and serious the problems are in the South. He said the government's tactics and disregard for the rule of law has further alienated the general populace in the region and that Muslims feel like they do not have an outlet to the

government. Chaturon said his assessment is that the violence is still localized in the far southern Muslim majority provinces because most often it is often directly related to local grievances or a cycle of revenge killings between security forces and local Muslims. He indicated that this cycle of violence is beginning to take on a life of its own.

COMMENT

16. (C) Chaturon is a well regarded and outspoken politician, especially on social issues. He has a carefully cultivated public image of a humble, uncorrupt politician and he is consistently rated as one of the most popular members of the Thaksin administration. In person he is thoughtful and soft-spoken and is obviously seriously concerned about the deteriorating situation in the South. While Chaturon is popular with many voters and has a prominent public position, he is not considered to be part of the Prime Minister's inner circle, and by all indications Thaksin does not seek his counsel on how to handle the South. During the meeting, the Ambassador related an earlier private conversation he had with the Prime Minister. The Ambassador had asked Thaksin if the creation of the NRC was an admission that Chaturon had been right about the South back in April 2004. Thaksin, gritting his teeth, said, "No! His proposals were wrong at that time, but happen to be right now." Chaturon took some obvious satisfaction from the anecdote, but indicated that his calls for Thaksin and the government to understand the complex cultural and religious elements in the South and deal with the problem in a comprehensive fashion are being largely ignored. END COMMENT

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE:

17. (C) Chaturon was born on January 1, 1956 into a prominent, politically active family. During his studies in the Faculty of Medicine, Chiang Mai University, he became a political activist and was president of the Chiang Mai University Student Union in 1976. He played a significant role during the October 1976 student uprising. Following the government's crackdown, Chaturon left school and escaped into the northern jungle to join the Communist Party of Thailand. He returned home in 1980 and subsequently traveled to the U.S. for further studies, receiving a BA in Economics from the State University of New York at Buffalo and an MA in Economics from American University. He worked toward, but did not complete, a Ph.D. at American University.

18. (C) Chaturon first won a parliamentary seat in the 1986 election as a Democrat. However, he and his faction (the 10 January faction) later split from the DP and formed the Prachachon (People's) Party. He later was briefly in Chart Thai before joining the NAP in 1991, winning a seat in three of the four succeeding elections (the exception was September 1992). During the mid-1990s, Chaturon served as NAP spokesman and in April 1999, he became the party's secretary general after a tough contest with Sanoh Thienthong. At least in part due to the animosity generated by his snub in not receiving the secretary generalship, Sanoh left the party for Thai Rak Thai. Ironically, Chaturon quit the NAP and followed Sanoh into Thai Rak Thai in June 2000, where he was elected to the Lower House in the number 15 position on the TRT party list in January 2001. Following the TRT's election victory he was named Minister attached to the Prime Minister's Office. During the March 2002 shuffle, Chaturon became Minister of Justice, and in October 2002 he was moved to his current position as Deputy Prime Minister, where he focuses on social issues and education. Chaturon's past positions include Secretary to the Deputy Finance Minister (1986-87), Secretary to the Commerce Minister (1990-91), and Deputy Finance Minister (1996). He is also widely remembered for the leading role he played in the movement opposing the Suchinda government in 1992. Chaturon is an avid soccer player and fan.

END BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

BOYCE